

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit

February 2023

*A New
Beginning*



Change is coming



Change appears to be the theme as we move into a new year. On our cover, Pope Francis gives his blessing to the new global leader of the Oblates, Fr. Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, OMI, who takes over from Fr. Louis Lougen, OMI.

Ukraine continues its defence against the brutal invasion by Russia in a war that has escalated, claiming thousands of lives, and has led to the impoverishment of not only the people of Ukraine, but millions around the world who have felt the impact of escalating prices blamed on a global supply chain impacted by Russia's invasion.

The cost of living has dramatically risen and is having an impact on this publication. Meetings and soul-searching have led us to a fork in the road, one that we hope will continue to provide benefit to the poor while reducing the costs of producing *Oblate Spirit*.

We will still produce five publications this year, but will only print and mail three to all the valued members of the MAMI family. The other two publications, along with other communications from the MAMI office, will be e-mailed and will appear in your inbox in a timely fashion. If you haven't done so, please provide us with an up-to-date e-mail address. We hope this will allow us to stay in touch with you on a regular basis and keep you better informed of developments in the missions we serve.

We pray that you can continue to help us nourish the souls and bodies of those in need at home and around the world as we try to walk these two communication paths at the same time.

The poor and under-privileged are counting on us.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators



Fr. Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso receives a blessing from the Oblate brothers

The Oblates elected Fr. Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, OMI, as their new Superior General during the 37th General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Rome (blessed by Pope Francis in our cover photo). He was serving in the Western Sahara at the time of his election. Br. Harley Mapes of Ottawa was in attendance at the Chapter and shared a touching moment that occurred during a meeting of the Brother delegates.

"While waiting for one of our translators to arrive, the Superior General walked by, saw us gathered and decided to join us. He expressed his gratitude for accidentally discovering our gathering since he intended to meet with us before the Chapter finished. Then, taking us by complete surprise, he knelt and asked for our blessing."

A new beginning

BY JOE GUNN

OTTAWA – Socrates was said to be fond of telling his students that “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

If we are to believe the words of this Greek founder of Western philosophy, Oblate lives are very worthy, indeed! For an entire month in late 2022, 79 Oblates gathered in Italy, from 70 countries around the world, to deliberate the future in the congregation’s 37th General Chapter.



Joe Gunn

What were the major conclusions Oblates arrived at as they examined their lives and ministry?

First, Oblates stated that they are “committed to building a synodal Church with the Holy Father.” For this reason, the *Centre Oblat* and three Oblate retreat centres across Canada are committed to offering webinars to all those interested in continuing the dialogue towards “communion, participation and mission” – the themes of the Synods on Synodality (planned for bishops meeting in Rome in both October 2023 and 2024.) Everyone interested in deeper renewal is invited to discuss and learn how our church structures and ministries can reflect the synodality that Pope Francis calls us to journey toward.

Second, Oblates promised to “commit ourselves to work... for the protection of our common home” and stated that “The encyclical *Laudato Si* is for us an exhortation to be closer to the people and to creation. “The congregation worldwide has signed on to *The Laudato Si Action Platform* and devoted an entire section of the Chapter document to this priority. It is envisioned that every residence, parish, and Oblate institution will put concrete environmental action into practice.



Meeting with the Pope in Rome

Additionally, Oblates announced that “We take responsibility to do much more to promote justice and peace.” In Canada, that means recognition that “the hard work of healing and reconciliation (with Indigenous communities) must remain a priority for Oblates.” Also, the Chapter promised that Oblates will “take up again the centrality of the poor” in all their missionary discernment.

How might these Oblate decisions alter the purpose of our own lives and vocations?

Canada was well represented by Oblates at the General Chapter. Lacombe’s Provincial Ken Thorson attended *ex officio*, Richard Beaudette was the province’s elected delegate, Harley Mapes was the elected brother delegate for the Canada-U.S. region, and Sandra Prather travelled to Italy as part of the group representing lay associates. Fidele Munkiele, superior of the Kenya Mission and a member of OMI Lacombe Canada, also attended, but as a delegate of the Africa-Madagascar Region. These leaders will be primarily responsible for planning how the Chapter decisions can be “brought home” to Canada. As Aristotle further added to Socrates’s thought: “An unplanned life is not worth examining.”

A major decision of the Chapter was to elect the 14th Superior General, Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, a Spaniard serving in the Western Sahara. It is hoped that “Father Chicho” (as he is known) will come to share his own vision with Canadians later this year.

These are some ways we can all contribute to making the Chapter aspirations come alive.

(Joe Gunn is the Executive Director of Le Centre Oblat)



Dear MAMI friends from Lacombe Province!

This year we, in Ukraine, feel the meaning of real Christmas like never before. Jesus was born in a manger. There was no light, water, and heat. It was not comfortable. Mary may have been scared, and Joseph felt helpless. As we are now.

However, Jesus was born, illuminating the whole world.

And He comes, once again to us. Not only today. Not only at Christmas. Whenever we open our heart to Him illuminates the darkness of the world. He set light in our heart, a spark of hope, love, joy.

Yes, it will probably not be easy for us in the next months as well. However, we are not alone. Thank you for being with us. And this year, so thirsty for light, we are prayerfully carrying you to Jesus. He was born and is waiting for us. To comfort us. To give light. To give Hope. To give Salvation.

May the newborn Jesus light up your souls and give you true peace and joy.

In Christ!

Fr. Pavlo Vyshkovskiy, OMI



In Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine with a population of almost five million people, the Oblates, together with volunteers, distributed more than 300 tonnes of food to the inhabitants of the city and also sent some food to other cities facing military actions by the attacking Russians. Providing assistance to people who have suffered from war and its consequences is one of the priorities of MAMI.



In your words

BY MARY CROOKS

SOUTH FARMINGTON, NS – Greetings in a spirit of thanksgiving in Christ!

In late spring of 2022, while visiting with family in Sherwood Park, AB, I heard a priest from MAMI who presented an overview of your mission work in Kenya. He was Australian by origin (Gerry Conlan, OMI) and now a servant of the Lord wherever needed. I was especially struck by his emphasis on encouraging and facilitating the people to gain education and to exercise responsibility and leadership in their own communities. He seemed to reflect a respect for their cultural heritage and hope for their dignity.

His words implied a relationship of reciprocal respect and learning with each and now sharing the gifts that God has given us and growing spiritually as the Body of Christ. In this sense, I also listened for indications of insight for the residential school pain – that your work would continue with a deeper humility.

I was grateful to have heard his words and I pray for you and all our Church that we may, like you, persevere in courage and trust, and with simplicity and sincerity.

United in Christ – His wounds and His resurrection,

Mary Crooks

Check out our Facebook page:



Lacombe Canada MAMI

Website: <https://www.omilacombe.ca/mami/>



YouTube Lacombe MAMI Oblate Missions

We are proud of the many decades that MAMI has blessed our world

BY KEN FORSTER, OMI

VANCOUVER – In the midst of unprecedented social and environmental crises, it is important for Christians to have confidence that we still can make a difference and that our action is important to the plan of God. The Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI) becomes your arms reaching out in partnership with the poor in our many missions. The missionary Oblates reach the poor on your behalf, walking with them as they try to attain the basic needs for life.



Ken Forster, OMI

In 2022, we have enabled nearly two million of your dollars to reach the oppressed, crushed brothers and sisters especially in Ukraine, Kenya and Peru. Some has been shared as charity distributing food through Catholic Youth in the Mathare slums of Nairobi, to the victims of destruction of homes through war in Ukraine, providing basic toiletries to women in Langata Prison in Nairobi, support of HIV Aids victims, providing education and serving orphans. Some has matched the donations of local people to realize projects bringing water through boreholes or constructing churches which are places of worship but also community building. We do this without any government assistance either from Kenya or Canada. We do this without using any portion of your donation to cover our administra-

tion costs; this cost is borne by OMI Lacombe Province as our Oblate financial contribution in partnership with the poor who themselves contribute 50 per cent of the project cost or give labour in-kind.

“Fratelli Tutti” (Brothers and Sisters All). Together we can make this happen. Consider making a bequest to MAMI so that your love enables God’s love to be incarnate beyond a Christmas celebration. In his Encyclical “Fratelli Tutti”, Pope Francis calls us to solidarity. “Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few.”

Thank you.

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To take advantage of this tax-saving offer, please call Diane Lepage (1-866-432-6264) at our office for further information. A minimum market value of \$5,000 is suggested. We would be happy to facilitate this exchange that benefits you and the poor of the Oblate missions. To view an excellent instructive tutorial on how you can increase the value of your donation of securities and earn a tax credit at the same time: <https://omilacombe.ca/powerful-way-leave-legacy-2/>



The charred remains of a house fire

Prayers answered after fire destroys a home

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA ALTA, Peru – A family of six lost their house plus all their belongings and were left with only the clothes on their backs when their home was destroyed in a fire.

The family was comprised of a grandmother who can't speak (she has a tube through a hole at her throat), the young parents and three children. The young mother had a little store at the front of her house selling what she could to support the family when the fire destroyed their humble home.

I was made aware of the fire at breakfast table on a Wednesday morning when Br. Omar mentioned there was a fire in the community where he was teaching, and how the family lost everything. Padre Justo, our parish priest, and I hurried to the scene. It was a sad sight.



Work crew cleans up after the fire

I spoke to the family and asked them to pray to Our Blessed Mother that people will come to their aid. I asked our great work team to stop all other projects and respond immediately. Meanwhile, the town sent equipment to clear the mess.

The foundation was immediately dug and building materials were delivered. Someone donated 2,000 bricks and cement. We provided four beds plus food, and the community prepared a meal to raise funds to help in the construction.

I ran out of funds, but the kind store owner gave me credit.

We erected three good-sized rooms and the finished house is bigger and better constructed. The family slept in the community hall during construction and moved into their new and better house within weeks.

My motto is: "Do what we can now, because tomorrow some of us could be dead!"

With help from MAMI in Canada, the store bills were paid. The community responded so well and the family that lost everything was overjoyed as their new home was built in about a month.

Thanks and love to MAMI supporters for all your support. We couldn't do this without you.



Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

OCT. 15

NAIROBI – Andrew and George from the Nairobi Oblate Youth continued to share food with many families at Mathare Slum. They have agreed to allow our pre-novices to visit some of the homes of the poor. I think it will be good for our young men to see how

poorly many people are living, to increase appreciation for what they have here.



Nairobi Oblate Youth continue to share food in the Mathare Slum



Gerry Conlan, OMI

As I left the house one day, I was flagged down by a middle-aged man. He asked for help, saying he had not eaten for two days. I gave him money and a ride. His wife died six months ago, and he has not been able to get a job. When I asked why his friends can't help for such a small amount, he said all his neighbours and friends are tired because they helped him a lot for his wife during her sickness and funeral. It was certainly sobering to hear

the man's story. He was grateful for the support I gave and went on his way.

OCT. 23

Politics is now evolving in Kenya. According to reliable sources, the Director of Public Prosecutions has withdrawn many corruption cases, and banks have been given

instructions to unfreeze the frozen accounts for people in court for corruption. It is not a good start to the new political era.

At the same time, Kenya is enduring a cholera outbreak in several counties and there is an ebola outbreak in Uganda on the border with Kenya. Please spare a prayer for the Kenyan people.

We heard from our brother Oblates in Ukraine, who courageously remain with the people during these dangerous times. I believe Russia has crossed the line and become a terrorist nation, bombing innocent people and a country that is not attacking Russia.

OCT. 30

I am heading to Kisaju parish for an official welcome and thanksgiving mass for our new Fr. Phelix. Drought continues in the north and even in our Kisaju Parish. Fr. Phelix has been visiting some Maasai families and they are almost crying as their cattle and few sheep literally lay down and die in front of them due to lack of feed. They can find water in some locations, like at the factories near our Kisaju house that provide a trough outside their gates and fill it for the animals twice a day. It is heart-warming to see.

We've been having water problems at Karen, and I think I'm Mr. Unpopular with some people as I jump up and down about the water wastage and overuse of the pump running on grid power instead of solar power during the day.

NOV. 5

The terrible drought continues in northern in Kenya. Strangely, the Kenyan Government flew a load of

Fr. Phelix offers blessings



emergency food relief to Somalia to help the starving people there. It's good, but many people in Kenya are wondering why they can't do the same for our own people in northern Kenya.

We attended another thanksgiving mass at Kisaju for Fr. Phelix. It coincided with a Marian Celebration to close the month of October. They started with a long procession on the dusty road, which I declined due to my lack of hair and no decent hat. After Holy Communion, people got in line for a

personal blessing, and a group of secondary boarding-school boys offered Fr. Phelix a Maasai blanket. Fr. Phelix is a very joyful person, and this is appreciated by the people.



Fr. Phelix is presented with a Maasai blanket

NOV. 12

We were blessed with visitors from Canada including Valerie, her son Chris, and Mack, an expert in wastewater management. They are here to do volunteer work for Nakuru County, and Valerie thought Chris might help us overcome some challenges at the Mission.

NOV. 19

The great blessing for the week has been heavy rains widespread all over Kenya. Of course, the treasurer (me) is not happy because we have to turn on the hot water booster, and the solar-power system has reduced efficiency. But the benefits for the farmers are great.

This week Fr. Daquin and Euticus, our farm manager, started replacing about 2,000 tree seedlings that died

New seedlings for Kiirua farm



last year. Fr. Daquin is also trying a small number of avocado and lemon trees.

NOV. 26

There have been heavy rains during the week and a nation-wide blackout for about 18 hours in many places, requiring us to use our backup generator.



Fr. Gerry with
graduate Laban

Laban, the son of our former cook, graduated as an automotive mechanic. He was most pleased with himself. His brothers were there, and he asked me to be the parent because his mother was busy working (the dad ran away long ago).

DEC. 3

We thank God the rains continued pretty much all over Kenya this week. Somalia, on our northern doorstep, is such a sad, suffering country in the grip of drought.

We celebrated the 27th anniversary of St Eugene's canonisation, which basically proclaimed to the world that St. Eugene's vision and spirituality were valid and can be promoted as a model for others to imitate. He's often known as the Patron Saint of Broken Families as he spent most of his life trying to get his parents back together.

Nairobi Oblate Youth year-end party



DEC. 10

We gratefully received permission from Fr. Fidele for the Nairobi Oblate Youth to gather at our Administration House for a year-end party.

I paid Dancan, our cook, to come and make sure the kitchen was not badly used

when a team of the youth prepared lunch from scratch. We now have three children in the group as some of the women are married.

The youth surprised me by buying a beautiful chocolate cake and asked me to sing a song – so I tried to sing the old country song: The green, green grass of home. I later

drove them to Karen so they could grab the bus to town. It was a good day for them and us, but longer than I expected.



Nairobi Oblate Youth group year-end party



Nairobi Oblate Youth group year-end party



Happy Birthday Fr. Gerry

DEC. 17

I travelled to Rome for meetings and started by spending a couple of days with my dear sisters and niece who also flew into Rome. Our Oblate House in Rome kindly allowed all of us to stay for a few days.

Rome was wet and raining most of the week. Our meetings went well. Our new superior general wanted to get briefed on the Kenya Mission. On the last evening, he invited us to dine with the General Council members. It was nice and broke down some barriers.

I was happy to meet with a familiar face, Romo Asodo from Indonesia. He was elected as the new councillor for Asia-Oceania in September. He's been given responsibility for First Formation. I questioned him about the number of young men joining us who have no practical skills or even knowledge about life, or practical things like fixing leaking taps or changing a light bulb. How can we evangelize people – or be close to the people – when we are unable to talk to ordinary people about ordinary things?

We hope some changes will come – stricter guidelines about helping young men get skills before they join us. We need to see preparation that involves practical training in electrical, or plumbing or welding, or auto-mechanics. A variety in the community would be very helpful. And, more importantly, they can make a better decision to join us because they want to, not because they can't do anything else.

DEC. 24

Our Oblate youth in Nairobi managed to distribute food to 55 families at Mathare Slum, giving each family four kilograms of maize flour (corn). This is the staple diet, a lot of energy in each meal. Andrew and George distributed enough food to ensure as many as possible have something to eat on Christmas Day.

JAN. 1

We had a funeral for Godfrey Mugiira, the brother of Fr. Dionisius: may he RIP. He was only 46 and leaves behind two boys and his wife. Almost all the Oblates in Kenya attended.

Our Nairobi Oblate Youth gave a bit more comfort and hope to the many families in Mathare Slum with a year-end visit to distribute food. Each time they buy 10 bales of Unga (corn flour), each containing 12 packets of two kilos. They distribute two packets to each family that is selected by local women.



New life at Kiirua farm

I visited the Kiirua Farm to meet Euticus and his family. We inspected the farm, and I was happy with all the green grass and trees after two years of low rainfall. The trees are growing well, and I was happy Fr. Daquin ordered the planting of more fruit trees, lemons, and avocados. This time we are creating an orchard, all in in one area for better care, rather than spread out on a long line as I had done five years ago.

JAN. 8

Fr. Fidele travelled to the coast for a few days off and partly to check on the land at Malindi and Watamu with our lawyer there. Many Italians are selling their properties in Malindi because President Uhuru signed an extradition agreement to allow Kenya to return fugitives wanted by Interpol to Italy. I heard that most of the Italians have fled to Zanzibar. The number of properties on sale caused the prices to drop significantly.

JAN. 15

We learned that corruption is costing Kenya more than a trillion shillings (about US\$8.1 billion). That is enough money for people to have free medical and free education. It's a frightening figure, especially when the government just borrowed the same amount to balance the budget, in addition to even more money borrowed at high bond rates. The poor people will be paying it off forever.



Mass at Jamii Bora school



Every cent of every dollar
you give will go ***entirely***
to the mission works
and ministries of the Oblates.

A trip to the Mathare Slum

BY GERRY CONLIN, OMI

NAIROBI, Kenya – Canadian visitors received a first-hand look at the Mathare Slum after their recent arrival in Kenya.

Valerie, her son Chris, and Mack, an expert in waste-water management from near Toronto, arrived in November to do some volunteer work for Nakuru County.

The guests joined us for breakfast and toured our Karen property and garden before we departed for the Mathare Slums in Nairobi early in the afternoon to distribute food to the poor.

Before distributing food, we visited a few homes and met the brave women looking after the children. We only met one elderly man, a drunk who was most courteous but in danger of falling over. We saw some youth lounging around next to a basketball court with nothing to do.

Most of the women are looking after their grandchildren. They are such courageous and loving people struggling with responsibilities not of their making.

Fr. Gerry with visitors from Canada





A river runs through the Mathare slum

One woman said her 21-year-old daughter ran away and left three little children for her to look after. To get into her house you basically jump down a two-foot drop at the front door (caused by a narrow pathway being backfilled to prevent flooding). Grandma is 45 but looks almost 70.

The next woman shared how she lives with her last-born son,

20, who is often distraught. Due to boredom and frustration, most of the young men turn to drugs. They just see no hope, no opportunities for themselves. The mother said if she has no food in the house, her son would sometimes grab two knives and threaten her: *"I should kill you and kill myself to end it all."* The mother says her son does love her, but does not like to see any of them suffering.

In the early days of the food program by the Nairobi Oblate Youth, the Mathare facilitator was a tricky character who simply invited different members of the same extended family, so basically all the people getting help were from one clan.

An elderly woman rebuked George, from the Oblate Youth, asking him, *"why do you give all the food to one family?"* Then the woman introduced him to Jacinta, who manages a small drop-in centre (safe zone) for girls and women in the centre of the slum, and it has been very effective, because Jacinta and her helper Lucy know where many of the poorest can be found.

The women were telling us, *"What the young men need are regular mentors and counsellors. The girl child is being given*

much attention (sponsors, along with regular and ongoing counsellors), but the boy child is being neglected."

She said when a boy is sexually abused, he has no one to help him, or counsel him or, if counsellors come one week, they are no longer coming afterwards.

Mack, our Canadian guest, reflected during our trip home about how the women keep their little houses neat and tidy. Their homes are only 10 square feet, not much larger than a bathroom, but full of all their stuff stacked in containers on top of each other. There is a bed, sometimes a double decker, a small table, and some seats. A few had old, small TVs.

One elderly woman had lived in the house for 40 years. Because there are few TVs, the children run to the older neighbours to watch television.

A problem for children getting into school was presented to us: if a child has no birth certificate, they cannot be admitted. That seems silly. It's not the child's fault.

Anyway, the woman at Mathare who facilitates the visit by our Oblate Youth, said they are working on helping children obtain a birth certificate. She told me when the children don't



Rebuilding after a fire in the slum

go to school, they are often sexually abused. She is helping a small family with two children. The mother is single because the husband ran away. I wish I had my video when the little girl tried to carry two five-pound bags of maize flour home and one fell off because it was too heavy for her. Quick as a flash, the little brother bent down to try and lift it out of the mud.



Oblate Youth Mathare food program

I gave them a hand to pick up their bag and they marched off, proudly clutching one packet each, close to their chest.

I quietly gave George, the food distributor, a few dollars to help them along. Several of the food recipients made a point of coming to Mack, Chris and me to express their gratitude.

This experience was a God-moment for me, a sobering challenge to the relative comfort I enjoy at Karen.



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We have the ability to accept donations by way of credit card! Please complete the gift form enclosed, visit our website at www.omilacombe.ca/mami/donations/ to give on-line, or call our office toll free: 1-866-432-6264 and we will be pleased to assist you in facilitating your donation to the Oblate missions.

If you have an intention or someone special for whom you would like the Oblates to pray, we invite you to submit your prayer requests by e-mail to mamiprayers@sasktel.net



WANTED

YOUR STORIES!

There are many charities and good causes that solicit your support. Yet for some reason you have chosen to offer the Oblates your prayers, friendship and assistance.



We are curious:

Why did you choose us?

How did you hear about the Oblate missionary work?

How have the Oblates supported, inspired and encouraged you?

What are some of your best memories of Oblates and their missionary work?

Send your stories (and photos) to:
lacombemissions@yahoo.ca

Goat family expands

The 18-member St. Dorcas women's group in Our Lady of Assumption Gachanka Prayer House in Kenya builds fellowship through the undertaking of various activities that include charitable actions from their small-scale and domestic projects. The group initiated domestic goat farming in November 2021 with financial support from MAMI (Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate) and was rewarded this fall when Muthomi Diana's goat gave birth to a kid. With God's blessing, there is hope the goat family will grow and provide support for the women's group.



Madame Muthomi Diana



AMMI Lacombe Canada
MAMI is pleased to
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bringing the love of God
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